

Italy

Country Overview

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Country name

Italy

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Introduction

In Italy, the implementation of social and emotional skills (SES) programmes is recent, often aimed at enhancing a specific skill rather than working in parallel on all five interrelated skills identified by the CASEL (CASEL, 2021) model, namely: self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, relationship skills, making decisions responsibly.

Development

The Italian kindergarten (3-6 years) is organised by children's experience fields, rather than subjects, and aims to develop various skills and competences, including socio-emotional ones, as required by the National Guidelines of the Ministero dell'Istruzione, Ministero dell'Università e della Ricerca, MIUR (Minister of Education, University and Research) and by European Parliament, considering that they contribute to the construction of children's identity, autonomy, and competence and initiate them to citizenship.

In 2020, a research (Stringher, 2020/07/15) in kindergartens was carried out for the first time by the INVALSI (INVALSI, 2021) organisation of the Ministry of Education (see section II, assessment). INVALSI is a research body with legal personality under public law that has collected, in a long and constant process of transformation, the legacy of the European Education Centre (CEDE, Centro Europeo dell'Educazione), which was established in the early seventies of the last century. The research includes the assessment of all areas of the school, including the development of SES.

No "measurement tests" were used, however, the teachers' perception of children's development are privileged. This research analysed the educational and teaching practices at the national level for the first time, highlighting how it is necessary to develop the skills of teachers in reading data during self-assessment and teacher training. The research has shown that kindergartens give great importance to the development and well-being of the child, and that the professionalism of educators is increasingly shifting from aspects of care to an all-round reflection on well-being, involvement, development and the learning of the children. In Italy there are pilot experiences on SES / social and emotional learning (SEL) development and measurement (see below, section III - intervention).

Assessment

In Italy, the evaluation of educational institutions is the task of INVALSI (INVALSI, 2021). The evaluation and quality aspects of the school system, evaluation and quality aspects of the school system are already structured and tested for schools, while evaluation in pre-school institutions is in an experimental phase. In preschools, the evaluation system is based on self-assessment.

The 2020 research shows that there is a limited use of accredited tools for measure the well-being and the development of children: 53.2% of teachers declare that they do not use any formalised tool to detect areas of interest, well-being and development of children, 20% say they detect children's interests and inclinations, and 23% of them are using formalised tools.

The research also shows that there are few trainings offered to teachers for the observation of children with self-assessments provided.

As mentioned above, building on teachers' perceptions, children's development, including SES, can be documented through the evaluation process.

Intervention

One intervention described by Cavioni and Zanetti, called CON LA TUA MANO (Cavioni & Zanetti, 2015), and implemented in the North of Italy with children of 5 years of age, had followed children during the transition from kindergarten to primary school. The programme included 10 weekly meetings, one hour a week, in which, through familiar situations, children could understand the basic emotions, the causes that usually activate them and the consequences, and how to self-regulate in the management of emotions.

The study on the effectiveness of the programme was carried out by making measurements before and after intervention, when the children were still in the last year of pre-primary school, and also after 1 year (Follow up 1), and 18 months from the pre-test (Follow up 2), when the children attended the first grade of primary school. At each measurement, the tools used were the following:

to measure the understanding of emotions, the Test of Emotion Comprehension (Pons, 2005) calibrated for children from 3 to 11 years of age and in this case administered directly to children by researchers;

to measure the general level of emotional adaptation and relationships with adults and peers, the evaluation (Rosario Montiroso, 2007) calibrated for children from 2.5 to 6.5 years of age and used here in the version for teachers; for the measurement of emotional difficulties and behavioural (emotional symptoms, behavioural problems, inattention / hyperactivity, or ADHD, problems with peers) and prosocial behaviours. The Italian Version of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Tobia, Gabriele, & Marzocchi, 2013) was completed here by the parents.

Another significant programme, implemented in 2015, uses a conversational path to promote the development of the emotional vocabulary, knowledge of basic emotions and behaviour prosocial in nursery children. The programme, developed by the group research from Ilaria Grazzani of the University of Milan Bicocca, uses conversation in a small group and, takes inspiration from the stories told in the book L'EMOZIONANTE MONDO DI CIRO E BEBA (The exciting world of Ciro and Beba) (Agliati, Brazzelli, Gandellini, Grazzani, & Ornaghi, 2015) to promote knowledge about the three main components of socio-emotional competence, namely expression, understanding and the regulation of emotions, as well as cooperative behaviours and help.

The book presents eight stories that have a couple of bunnies acting as protagonists, Ciro and Beba, who live a series of adventures in which rabbits feel frightened, happy, angry, or sad. The stories always follow the same format: after the scene is set, a critical situation causes a particular emotion and prosocial action, which is required to resolve the crisis.

The nurseries' teachers participated previously in special training for a period of 3 months and received guidelines for conducting the reading.

Researchers used an experimental method and an observational paradigm to evaluate the effectiveness, working with small groups (one educator to four to six children), to encourage the exchange between children.

The DREAM Project (Development and Run-test of an Educational Affective Model) (Silva et al., 2019; <http://dream-edu.eu>) lasting three years (2016-2019), cofounded by EU in the framework of the ERASMUS+ programme and coordinated by the University of Florence (Department of Education, Languages, Interculture, Literature and Psychology), proposed an in-service training on emotions and tools in the educational contexts addressed to children 0 to 3 years of age, in kindergarten and primary school.

The project focused mainly on the teachers' knowledge on SES, and – thanks to the focus group involving educators and teachers – their methodologies for detecting and measuring children'

SES in education from birth to 10 years were analysed.

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